

Ghana

80

FREE

/100

Political Rights

35/40

Civil Liberties

45/60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

80 /100 Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

Since 1992, Ghana has held competitive multiparty elections and undergone peaceful transfers of power between the two main political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Although the country has a relatively strong record of upholding political rights and civil liberties, discrimination against women persists, and LGBT+ people face widespread discrimination, intimidation, and violence. There are some weaknesses in judicial independence, key governance institutions, and the application of the rule of law. Corruption and public service delivery present challenges to government performance. Politically motivated violence remains a concern.

Key Developments in 2023

- In May, the opposition NDC selected former president John Mahama to contest the 2024 presidential election. In November, the ruling NPP selected Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia to run; Bawumia will be the NPP's first Muslim presidential candidate.
- In July, Parliament voted to abolish the death penalty by amending the Criminal and Other Offences Act (COA) of 1960 and the Armed Forces Act (AFA) of 1962. President Nana Akufo-Addo approved those amendments in August.
- A wide-ranging bill that would limit the rights of LGBT+ people remained under consideration during the year. In July, lawmakers approved a parliamentary committee's report that supported the draft, and the Supreme Court rejected a legal challenge to the bill.
- Several major cost-of-living and antigovernment protests were held during the year, with authorities seeking injunctions and using force to prevent or disperse demonstrations. In September, police clashed with protesters who sought to occupy the presidential palace in Accra, with witnesses accusing police of attacking demonstrators; police arrested 49 people in that incident.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

4 / 4

The president, who serves as head of state and head of government, is directly elected for up to two four-year terms. President Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP was reelected in December 2020 with 51.3 percent of the vote, while his predecessor, John Mahama of the NDC, took 47.3 percent. African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) observers called the contest well-organized and generally peaceful, though EU monitors criticized a lack of campaign finance regulation and a misuse of state resources. Mahama rejected the results, alleging fraud, and issued a legal challenge that the Supreme Court rejected in March 2021.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

4 / 4

Members of the unicameral, 275-seat Parliament are elected directly in single-member constituencies to serve four-year terms.

The NPP, which held a majority in the previous parliament, and the NDC each won 137 seats in elections held concurrently with the 2020 presidential contest. One seat was won by an independent who agreed to support the NPP, giving that party a bare de facto majority. Election observers lauded the elections' overall conduct.

By-elections were held in May and June 2023. One was triggered by the death of a member of Parliament (MP), while the other came after the Supreme Court ruled that another member could not serve due to his dual citizenship. Both contests were generally peaceful, free, and fair, though vote buying was reported. The parliamentary by-election held in June was marred by a clash between NPP and NDC supporters, leaving one person injured. The incumbent party retained the seat in each instance. Local elections were held in December but turnout was low.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

4 / 4

Domestic and international observers consider the Electoral Commission (EC) a capable manager of the electoral process. However, its composition is the subject of political disagreement; the opposition NDC has criticized what they claimed was the partisan appointment of Jean Mensa as its chairwoman in 2018, though civil society largely lauded the selection.

In general, electoral laws are enacted through broad consultations with parties and the legislature and are implemented fairly by the EC. While AU electoral observers lauded the registration process and the EC’s overall performance during the 2020 elections, the EC agreed to enact reforms, including the introduction of continuous voter registration. In 2022, the EC announced that voters will be required to present a National Identification Card (GhanaCard) to register to vote in the 2024 elections, in order to prevent ineligible people from casting a vote. The change drew criticism from the NDC for potentially discouraging eligible voters. In a February 2023 media interview, an NDC MP said that the GhanaCard’s use for voter registration would be appropriate if it was universally issued.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?	3/4
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The constitution guarantees the right to form political parties, and this right is generally respected. However, in late 2022, the EC cancelled the registration certificates of 17 political parties for noncompliance with the Political Parties Act of 2000 after finding that the parties did not have national or regional offices, as required by law. Despite the guaranteed formation of political groupings, civil society groups have expressed concern about the involvement of partisan vigilante groups in inter- and intraparty disputes. In addition, candidates from

smaller parties have expressed frustration with how difficult it is to compete with bigger parties due to increasing registration and filing fees.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

4/4

There have been multiple peaceful transfers of power between the NPP and NDC, and parties in opposition have meaningful opportunities to increase their public support and win office. Mahama's defeat in the 2016 presidential race marked the first time since the 1992 reintroduction of multiparty politics that an incumbent stood for reelection and lost. The NDC maintains strong support as an opposition party.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

3/4

Ghanaians are generally free from undue interference with their political choices by powerful groups that are not democratically accountable. Voters and candidates are threatened by vigilantism and politically motivated violence despite the 2019 promulgation of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, which banned all political and other vigilante groups.

NPP and NDC supporters clashed at several voter registration sites in 2020, despite an agreement between the two parties to refrain from such activity. Many of the perpetrators have avoided accountability for those acts. In December 2023, Lawyers in Search of Democracy (LINSOD), a nongovernmental organization (NGO), criticized the government for doing too little to investigate several deaths that occurred during the 2020 elections; LINSOD also said that government agents may have been responsible for some of those deaths.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

3/4

Ghanaian laws provide for equal participation in political life by the country's various cultural, religious, and ethnic groups. Women formally enjoy political equality but hold few leadership positions in practice. Women won 40 parliamentary seats in the December 2020 elections, the largest share since the reintroduction of multiparty politics. Very few women won office in local elections held in December 2023.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

4/4

Elected officials are generally free to set and implement government policy without improper influence from unelected entities. The Imposition of Restrictions Act, which was passed by Parliament and signed by Akufo-Addo in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic became a global crisis, limited Parliament's ability to revoke presidentially declared states of emergency. The Supreme Court ruled that law unconstitutional in May 2023.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

3/4

Political corruption remains a problem despite active media coverage, fairly robust laws and institutions, and both government and nongovernmental antigraft initiatives.

Legislation adopted in 2017 established the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) as an additional institution to investigate official and private corruption. Kissi

Agyebeng, a lawyer and academic, became the special prosecutor in 2021 following the resignation of Martin Amidu, the first person to hold the role. Amidu had resigned in 2020, citing a lack of resources and interference from the executive. In its June 2023 report, the OSP said four criminal cases were pending in Ghanaian courts, including that of the Public Procurement Authority's former chief executive. In July, the OSP announced the arrest of Cecelia Abena Dapaah, who had resigned as minister of sanitation days before, on suspicion of corruption.

In November 2023, Agyebeng said recent judicial decisions were undermining the OSP's work in prosecuting Akufo-Addo appointees accused of corruption and threatened to resign. In a joint statement issued by the OSP and Judicial Service in December, both institutions resolved to work together to fight corruption.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

3/4

The government operates with relative transparency, though there are weaknesses in the legal framework. The Right to Information Act (RTI Act), which grants citizens the right to seek, access, and receive information from public and some private institutions, took effect in 2020. Local stakeholders have complained about barriers and impediments to accessing information in practice, including arbitrary fees that public bodies charged groups that had requested information. In September 2023, the Right to Information Commission imposed a 200,000-cedi (\$17,300) administrative penalty against the Ghana Airports Company, which cited an exception within the RTI Act when it refused an information request from the JoyNews outlet.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

3/4

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. Ghana has a diverse and vibrant media landscape that includes state-owned and privately owned television and radio stations as well as a number of independent newspapers and magazines. Online news media operate without government restrictions. Government agencies occasionally limit press freedom by harassing and arresting journalists, especially those reporting on politically sensitive issues. Journalists face physical attacks and threats, sometimes issued by politicians, and security officers have attacked journalists with impunity in recent years. In November 2023, Information Minister Kojo Oppong Nkrumah said that the government would create a mechanism to address violence against journalists.

While libel was decriminalized in 2001, the COA and 2008 Electronic Communications Act (ECA) have a continued impact on media activity. In April 2023, the Media Foundation for West Africa and three Ghanaian media organizations called on the government to repeal provisions of the COA and ECA.

In March 2023, Noah Dameh, a radio journalist, was placed in police custody for a week for allegedly violating a COA provision on sharing purportedly false news; Dameh had criticized a salt-mine concession secured by businessman Daniel McKorley in 2022, prompting a police investigation. Dameh, whose health reportedly declined after his detention, died at his home in September 2023.

In May 2023, a radio presenter at Dagbon FM in Tamale was attacked by two people while on the air; days later, the assailants pled guilty and were fined. Also in May, a journalist with Angel FM in Accra was attacked by a group of people while he was collecting information for a story; two of the assailants were arrested and bailed. In October, soldiers physically attacked and then detained radio journalist Nicholas Morkah after he filmed them attacking another man in Birim Central Municipal District. Morkah was handed to police, who alleged that he engaged in “offensive conduct” and released him on bail.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	3/4
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Religious freedom is constitutionally and legally protected, and the government largely upholds these protections in practice. However, public schools feature mandatory religious education courses drawing on Christianity and Islam, and Muslim students have allegedly been required to participate in Christian prayer sessions and church services in some publicly funded Christian schools. Muslims have also accused private Christian schools of discrimination in recent years, saying that the schools restricted Muslim students from observing their own religious customs.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	4/4
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Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and generally upheld in practice.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	4/4
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Private discussion is both free and vibrant. The government does not restrict individual expression on media platforms.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	3/4
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The right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations, except for instances of state of emergencies. Under the Public Order Act (POA) of 1994, groups that intend to hold protests must notify police within five days. The POA allows police to request the postponement or relocation of a protest if they believe it would benefit the public interest.

Cost-of-living and antigovernment protests continued in 2023, with authorities seeking injunctions to limit those assemblies. In August, NDC MP Cassiel Ato Forson filed a notice ahead of a planned rally against the Ghanaian central bank. That protest was held in October, with demonstrators accusing the Bank of Ghana of fostering hyperinflation. In September, police clashed with protesters who sought to occupy the presidential palace, with witnesses accusing police of attacking demonstrators. Police arrested 49 people for violating the POA and a court injunction. Later in September, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the country's human rights ombudsman, criticized the police's conduct during that protest. In November, police sought a judicial order to stop three organizations from holding demonstrations in Accra scheduled for December 2023 and January 2024.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

4/4

NGOs are generally able to operate freely and play an important role in ensuring human rights protection, media freedom, and government accountability and transparency. However, the government was considering amendments to an existing law on NGOs, which civil society actors said would impede their operations, in 2023. A group of NGOs boycotted a workshop on the draft bill in October.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

3/4

Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, workers may form and join trade unions. Similarly, professional bodies are allowed to operate in the interest of their members. However, the government forbids or restricts organized labor action in several sectors, including fuel distribution and utilities, public transportation, and ports and harbor services.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	2/4
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Judicial independence is constitutionally and legally enshrined. While the judiciary has demonstrated some impartiality in recent years, the perception of corruption and delays in dispensing justice continue to pose challenges. In August 2023, Chief Justice Gertrude Torkornoo called on Ghanaians not to pay bribes to those who allegedly work for judges.

In September 2023, former president John Mahama accused the Akufo-Addo administration of appointing NPP supporters to the judiciary, calling on NDC supporters to become judges and “balance out” the branch.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	3/4
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Constitutional protections for due process and defendants’ rights are mostly upheld. Plea bargains for most criminal offenses were introduced via legislation signed in 2022. The government is not obliged to provide the accused with legal counsel, and many people unable to afford lawyers are forced to represent themselves in court.

Police have been known to accept bribes, make arbitrary arrests, and hold people without charge for longer than the legally permitted limit of 48 hours. A UN Office on Drugs and Crime report, released in 2023 and citing 2021 survey data, noted

that 53.2 percent of respondents said they paid bribes to police officers. Some 22.3 percent said they paid bribes to prosecutors, judges, or magistrates.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

3/4

Ghanaian law generally protects individuals from unlawful use of physical force by others, including security agencies, though police have sometimes used excessive force to disperse lawful demonstrators. Prisons are overcrowded and conditions can be life-threatening, though the prison service has attempted to reduce congestion and improve the treatment of inmates in recent years.

In July 2023, Parliament voted to abolish the death penalty by amending the COA and the AFA. President Akufo-Addo approved the amendments in August.

Violence related to communal, ethnic, and chieftaincy disputes occurs in parts of Ghana. In April 2023, Chieftaincy Affairs Minister Stephen Asamoah Boateng said that conflicts related to chieftaincies represented the bulk of the country's national security issues. Asamoah Boateng also said that many of those conflicts were related to land or power struggles.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2/4

Despite equal rights under the law, women face societal discrimination, especially in rural areas, where their opportunities for education and employment are limited. However, women's enrollment in universities has been increasing in recent years. People with disabilities face societal discrimination, despite a 2006 law on disability rights.

LGBT+ people face significant discrimination. Same-sex sexual activity is criminalized, encouraging impunity for violence against and harassment of LGBT+ people. LGBT+ people and advocacy groups have reported rising levels of harassment, intimidation, and sometimes lethal violence in recent years. A wide-

ranging bill that would further limit the rights of LGBT+ people has been under parliamentary consideration since 2021. The bill would impose harsher penalties on same-sex conduct; it would also criminalize displays of affection, cross-dressing, and certain forms of LGBT+ advocacy. In July 2023, MPs unanimously approved a March report from a parliamentary committee which recommended the bill's passage. Also in July, the Supreme Court rejected a legal challenge to the bill, allowing the parliamentary process to continue. The bill remained under consideration at year's end.

In July 2023, Parliament passed an amendment to existing legislation that would criminalize accusations of witchcraft but also would ban individuals from acting as witch doctors or witch finders. The amendment was crafted after a woman was lynched over accusations of witchcraft in 2020. In December 2023, President Akufo-Addo said he would not give assent, saying the amendment was written in a way that would violate the constitution.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?	3/4
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Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the constitution and is generally respected by the government. However, poorly developed road networks and banditry can make travel outside the capital and tourist areas difficult. Police have been known to set up illegal checkpoints to demand bribes from travelers. Bribery is also rife in the education sector.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?	3/4
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Although the legal framework generally supports property ownership and private business activity, weaknesses in the rule of law, corruption, and an underregulated property rights system are problems. Bribery is a common practice when starting a business and registering property. Political elites and government officials have increasingly appropriated public land for themselves in recent years. Land-rights issues and corruption in land acquisition persist as challenges despite the 2020 passage of the Land Act, which revised and consolidated land laws.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

3/4

While personal social freedoms are upheld in many respects and among large segments of the population, domestic violence and rape are serious problems, and harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation and early or forced marriage persist in certain regions.

Gender-based violence remains a major problem, though the government has worked to combat the issue. The government has expanded the police's domestic violence and victim support units and has formed special courts, though such services are reportedly under resourced.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2/4

Most workers are employed in the informal sector, limiting the effectiveness of legal and regulatory safeguards for working conditions. The exploitation of children in the agricultural and mining sectors remains a problem. Similar abuses in the fishing industry have also been reported, especially in the region surrounding Lake Volta.

In its *Trafficking in Persons Report 2023*, the US State Department noted that the government faces considerable challenges in addressing trafficking crimes, though

the government investigated more trafficking cases in 2022 than in 2021. The State Department also noted that Accra was implementing a 2022–26 National Plan of Action to address trafficking.



On Ghana

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Country Facts

Population

33,480,000

Global Freedom Score

80/100 Free

Internet Freedom Score

65/100 Partly Free

Other Years

2023

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